

Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

Beautiful Deeds Worked a Great Change in a Very Ugly Princess

A STORY SHOWING THAT KINDNESS
ALWAYS BRINGS GREAT REWARDS

THIS is a very curious story, and had it not been told to me by one in whom I have great faith I would scarcely have believed it myself; but all the same, you are quite at liberty to accept as much or as little of it as you wish.

I used to study magic with another artist named Percy D'Art, who finally declared that he had quite enough of conjuring and incantations and was going to forget it all and make his living by painting pictures, so for many a year I never saw him until at last he turned up and told me about the adventures of the Homely Princess.

Once upon a time there was born to a certain king a daughter who was so hideously ugly that it made everybody, even her mamma and her nurse, almost sick to look at her. She resembled a little, wrinkled monkey, her hair was red and scraggly, her eyes crossed and were of different colors, too; her mouth enormous and mis-shapen, her teeth crooked and dark and she had so many bumps on her head that she looked as if she had been broken and repaired by some incompetent person, while her body was distorted and out of all proportion.

Her father and mother both cried bitterly when they first saw her, and although they tried hard to love her, it was really impossible, for one look at her would turn all the love they both had into intensest loathing. She was certainly the homeliest child ever born. Her father, in fact, could not bear to look at her for an instant, for the sight of her made him dizzy with disgust and rage. It was her mother's custom to cover her with a veil when the King came into the room, but even her mother rarely looked at the ugly child. As she grew up she became, if possible, even more hideous. One of her legs was too short and the other too long, and her hair grew in patches of many colors like a rag carpet. Her mouth looked like that of a fish, except when she opened it, and then it resembled a rabbit's, for her teeth seemed to fill it completely.

The disgust and aversion which she excited in everybody about the court was soon apparent to the Princess even when a small child, and she very quickly learned to avoid every one. Even she was not surprised, for when about eight years old she saw her reflection in a mirror and was horrified. After that she never looked into a mirror, and, in fact, there was not one in the part of the palace where she was confined.

Confined she certainly was; a prisoner, indeed, for none was allowed to see her except the attendants especially designated for that task, and before long it was found impossible to retain attendants, for such was everybody's aversion to the child that prisoners of state were finally substituted and thus punished for their crimes. At first the Princess, whose name was Amine, was permitted to have pets about her, but so many of them sickened and died or went mad (very likely from merely having to gaze constantly upon Amine's face) that at last none were allowed her, and all that she had to play with were dolls; but as it was considered that the sight of pretty dolls would sadden her only very plain or even homely ones were given to her.

Thus she grew up with almost no knowledge of things beautiful, for although the King and Queen could not bear the sight of their child they did not wish to hurt her feelings by permitting her to see the awful contrast between herself and other children. Therefore beautiful paintings, tapestries and statues were banished from her apartments, although everywhere else in the palace they abounded.

She had a beautiful voice and learned to sing charmingly as well as to play many instruments, and sometimes her parents were charmed by her music, but never did they look at her when she played, but sat behind a curtain. This was her only pleasure in life, and finally, when she was eighteen years old, she begged her father to give her a house in some remote spot far away from the court, with a walled garden, where she could live among flowers and birds and with some few servants until she died.

The King, feeling a vast relief, readily granted her request, for as she grew older and uglier the sight of her disturbed him more and more, especially as she was his only child. Many foreign princes had asked him to present them to her. This, being, of course, impossible, had been refused, thereby causing trouble between nations, for the foreign princes declared that the King of Anotonia was too proud and haughty to allow his daughter to be seen by foreign eyes.

So Amine went away to her chosen retreat, and very gladly did she go, nor was she mourned by any in the palace. When she arrived at her little house among the trees of a deep wood, far from the city of Protocolis, she felt that all the ties that bound her to her father's court had broken and henceforth she was as one dead.

Determined to forget that she was a King's daughter she went to work in her garden resolving to bury all memory of court and royal manners among her flowers, but she found very soon that even here in this solitude she was haunted by her ugliness. When she approached a tiny bird on a branch it flew away with a startled cry and showed that it was terrified. She did not know that all wild birds acted thus, and thought it was her hideous face that had terrified the bird. The red squirrels mounted into the tall trees, and, half-hidden, clattered angrily at her, as if protesting against bringing such a face into the woods. The black, glossy moles hastened to bury themselves in the earth as she approached, and even the butterflies fluttered off quickly when she neared them. Only the mute flowers held their faces bravely up at her without protest, and she loved them.

One day a little child who had wandered into the forest with some others happened to find her garden gate open, and, filled with curiosity, entered. The Princess, walking along a path, came upon the child before he heard her and spoke to him. Looking up he saw that terrible face, and with one wild yell he fled with all his speed. It was the first child Amine had ever spoken to, and the impression she had made upon him caused her not to pity him but to hate all children from that time forth, so that when one of her servants told her that a mortal illness



THE DEATH OF THE DRAGON

was raging in the city of Protocolis among the children she replied, heartlessly:

"What care I? Let them die, the last little wretches!"

"The disease is catching," added the servant. "We must be careful."

"Neither care I for that!" replied Amine. "The sooner I catch it and die the better for all concerned. I have no wish to live."

One day in the dead of winter she heard a merry whistling and started in surprise. She looked out and there, striding through the snow, was a cheerful-looking man in a fur coat who was carrying a painting in his hand, a painting of woods and snow. He whistled so cheerily that she listened longer than she thought, and the man, coming near, saw her standing in the window. Instead of starting in horror he merely smiled and said: "Good morning, Princess."

She was so surprised to see a human being who was not afraid of her that she forgot all about being a King's daughter and said:

"What do you in these lonely, dreary forest wastes?"

"I am a painter," he said. "I have made a splendid study of the forest in the snow." He held it up for her to see, and he never seemed to notice that she was so hideous, for his eyes were full of the beauty of the scene.

"Oh, how beautiful!" cried Amine. "And I have been looking out at it for months and never knew that it was so lovely."

"Ah, that's how we artists tell our pictures. Most people can't see beauty until it has been put on canvas. People who wouldn't give a cent for a year's look at a landscape will give dollars for a few inches of it when it's painted and put in a frame."

Then he went on, whistling gaily.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Amine. "He looked right at me and never seemed to see me. That's a nice man and I hope he will come back."

But he did not come back, although she thought about him constantly and grew sadder and sadder every day until at last the spring began to tinge the woods with softest green, the flowers began to push up from the cold ground and the skies to mellow and she could walk out in the garden.

But somehow she no longer wished to busy herself with her flowers, and for long hours she stood looking out over the fields growing greener and greener every day, hoping that the merry man with the whistle might pass by, but all in vain. Then one morning she resolved to go into the forest and walk there among the green trees, although she would not admit, even to herself, that she hoped to find the painter there. She put on a great silk hood that hid her face, although she could not hide her distorted body and waddling walk, and then went forth.

She had never before been in the woods, and the solemn grandeur of the great trees, through whose tall tops the wind whispered like a great voice, frightened her a little bit; nor was she reassured when something went dashing through the underbrush with a great scurrying, a rabbit, perhaps, but it made so much noise that Amine thought of bears at once. She decided to return before anything got her, but, alas! she had taken no notice whatever of the direction in which she had been walking, and now went off further into the woods instead of emerging from them.

Deeper and deeper she went, and as she went the shrubbery grew denser, so that she could not see ten feet before her, and she became very much frightened. Her silk gown, which she had not meant for pushing through the brambles, was torn into rags and her knees were scratched by thorns; but she was in her hair and cobwebs in her eyes when suddenly she came to an open space and could see far away.

She was on a steep mountainside, and before her was a great dark opening in the rock that seemed as though it might be the den of the grandfather of all bears. A heavy black cloud hung low in the sky and threatened an immediate storm, so that it seemed that she must take refuge in the yawning cavern-mouth, and therefore she timidly moved toward it.

Now, this cavern was the home, the lair, of an awful dragon, which had for ages devastated all the region round about and had almost made it a wilderness. In fact, he would have ravaged the whole kingdom had he been free, but, being confined, fastened to the rock by a long chain, his destruction was limited to its length; but within the scope of that chain, gracious! what a deal of damage he had done.

Nobody dared to venture into the forest or mountains except after he had just eaten somebody, when he lay dormant for a few days, and here was poor Princess Amine right at his door! He had just awakened from a dream of eating six babies and opened his eyes to see what the weather was, for you must know that he never went out in the rain, as water would have instantly rusted his joints, when he saw a maiden standing in the opening of his cavern, right on his threshold. Springing up in such glee that he rattled like a load of tin cans, he ran right toward her, with his mouth wide open and his great teeth shining, but when he saw her face he stopped.

He began to tremble, and just then down came the rain in a flood. The dragon could not take his eyes away from Amine's hideous face, and he writhed and wriggled in agony for a few minutes, then with an awful howl he put down his head, shut his red eyes and dashed past her into the open air and the deluge of rain. With a dreadful shiver, for the very touch of the cold water was deadly to him, he sprang away, anxious only to escape from Amine's face. Down the rocky mountainside, across swamps and through forests, up hill and down dale as if pursued by furies he went, minding no obstacle, for now the rain-water was driving him almost frantic with pain, until he suddenly came to the end of the chain that confined him and he went head over heels.

A sharper, fiercer downpour of rain threw him into convulsions, and in his agony he determined to return to his cavern in spite of the horrid face up there; but now it was too late. Weakened by the rain, creaking in every joint, he tried to crawl back, but soon found that it was impossible.

Then the dark, rain-soaked forest heard a strange and awful sound. It was the voice of a dragon in anger. Animals far away in the remotest part of the woods shivered with dread as that terrible howl rang out and fled to their lairs, and even men far beyond the confines of the woods shrank back and trembled as they listened in awe. Howl followed howl, but each one weaker, fainter than the preceding, until at last a faint moan told that the awful, treacherous, bloodthirsty, voracious and insatiable monster was dying there among the rocks.

Amine stood watching him in terror, too frightened to move away from the mouth of the cave and step out into the pouring rain, but still quite carefully noting the fact that the dragon had become powerless, and soon, also, seeing that he was actually dying. She was rejoiced, for, like all who lived in that region, she had often heard of his doings, and now she felt that she had accomplished something at least. To have destroyed a dragon with a glance was certainly a feat, although it was a hideous face that had done it.

Suddenly the expiring monster wriggled his tail a little, gave one more weak, faint squeak and opened his mouth to catch his breath. That finished him, for the water poured into his interior and literally put him out, for, as you perhaps know, all dragons are filled with fire. Thus he was killed in a jiffy and never moved a claw afterward.

When Amine was certain that he was dead she felt able to move, but where was she to go? Night was approaching, and already the dark shadow of the mountains was spreading over the plains below, yet she was afraid to remain in that dreadful cave filled perhaps with awful relics of the feasts that the dragon never leaves the least scrap of anything, any more than a fire does, besides always sweeping up all the crumbs with a flame afterward.

As she stood hesitating she heard a footfall and then the painter appeared, coming rapidly toward her. When he saw her he exclaimed:

"Ah, you are safe, thank Heaven! I found your tracks in the soft earth of the forest and followed you here, but I did not expect to find you. I was sure the dragon had caught you, for no one ever approaches so near to his lair without being lost."

"He saw me," replied the Princess, "and he fled at once. Now he lies dead down on yonder plain."

"Dead!" cried the painter in amazement. "What

for it was my old comrade who was the painter. "It is a dreadful thing to say."

"I am tired of life," she cried. "What is there in it for such a hideous, distorted creature? Everybody hates and despises me, although I am a princess, and I have never had one happy moment since I was born."

"You are mistaken," replied Percy D'Art. "You have much to be thankful for. You have health and strength and a beautiful voice, a voice like a bird. You have never tried to learn how to be happy."

"Can one learn to be happy?" asked the Princess.

"Very easily," replied the artist.

"Oh, tell me at once," cried Amine. "I wish to begin now."

"Well, the very first thing that you must do is to make some other person happy; that's the first step. When you have succeeded the charm will begin to work, and little by little you will yourself become filled with contentment and finally complete happiness will be yours. It is very simple."

"But I do not know how to begin, for I have scarcely ever spoken to another human being in years, other than yourself. How shall I commence; how and where find somebody to begin on?"

"That I can not tell you, for if I knew of an unhappy person I myself would try to comfort him. Seek in the city and you will not have to seek far."

Then Percy led the Princess through the woods to her home, laughing and chatting merrily all the way, so that for the first time in her life she forgot all about her face and when he left her it was with the advice to seek at once for some unfortunate.

The next morning she went for the first time into the city and saw the dismal homes of the poor, and passed by windows where sick children peered out with wan, thin faces at the sky. She went to her garden and loaded herself with flowers and food and returned to the town. There she hesitated no longer, but went into the first poverty-stricken house and found a sick child to whom the food and the sight of the flowers was like a bit of heaven. The gratitude of the parents, as well as the child, went to Amine's hardened heart and so filled it with joy that she sang aloud.

Others, hearing that marvelous voice, crowded into the house and stood there awed, listening as to an angel. Amine saw that they had forgotten already her hideous face and distorted figure as they drank in the song, and a wonderful happiness welled up in her. She was already at peace.

When she first smiled at the sick child a change had begun. Her great, mis-shapen mouth had slightly altered that moment, and with each tender, loving smile, always growing more and more tender as her heart welled with sympathy, came a gradual shaping anew, until it grew into a mouth like a rose, the most perfectly lovely, kissable pair of lips in all the kingdom; and her eyes, so bulging and crossed, softened and changed into violet orbs that were dazzling as well as melting. Little by little her face was re-formed, becoming so beautiful that the people gazed at it with adoration, while her hair, always tied back and away from her sight, became a halo of golden glory.

Yet she knew now that all loved her, that the children ran to her and embraced her knees from pure affection, she imagined that they shut their eyes to her deformities.

At last the King refused to send her any more money, for he said that he had already expended far more than was necessary to support a girl in a little palace such as hers. He knew, of course, nothing of her charities, and naturally saw no reason for her spending so much money. Then Amine sold her horses and golden carriages, all her clothes and lace and jewels to procure the money needed to buy medicine and food for her poor.

At last she suddenly found that she had absolutely nothing left for herself, for in her great happiness she had never considered her own necessities.

Obligated at last to earn money for her own support, she knitted stockings which she sold in the market-place, and so great was the crowd that strove to buy of her and gaze upon her lovely face

A Child So Ugly That Even Its Royal Parents Could Not Love It

HOW AN ARTIST CLEVERLY WORKED
A MAGIC SPELL ON THE PRINCESS

that there was no room there for other dealers at all. Amine thought only that they bought from her out of gratitude, and marveled that she sold her stockings so quickly, hurrying to her poor children at once and then hastening home to knit more.

All this time she never saw Percy, although you may be sure she thought very often of the one who taught her to forget herself and who had brought her all this wondrous happiness. He was busy painting his pictures in the forest, but he heard from time to time from the wood-cutters of her kind deeds and her wondrous beauty, and as he painted he smiled to think how his magic spell was working. But at last he heard news that made him leap up in alarm.

One of the wood-cutters came to his little home in the forest with his weekly supply of provisions one morning, and after he had related all the smaller gossip of the city of Protocolis, Percy asked him if he had seen the Princess Amine.

"Alas, I fear that all harm may happen to her. Last week a child, the daughter of Paul the tanner, fell in the fire and was sadly burned. The doctors said she would die unless some kind-hearted person would suffer them to take from his body living skin to graft upon the burned child. Of course, we never expected that anybody could be found so unselfish and so charitable, although God knows there are kind men and women in the town, and so it fell out at first."

"No one responded to the appeal, although cryers went from door to door, until at last they came to that of the Princess. Instantly she responded, saying that the poor child could have all her skin—ah, that tender, beautiful skin—that was needed, and she hurried to the tanner's house at once. Even the doctors, who are hard-hearted enough usually, deplored the fact that the Princess' rosy skin should suffer, but she said that the beautiful child must be saved."

"And did they accept this sacrifice?" cried Percy in a rage.

"At last, after she insisted and reminded them that time was passing and the child suffering, they reluctantly agreed to deprive that beautiful being of some of her precious skin. For a tanner's brat!"

"And it was done?" tremblingly asked Percy.

"It was done. They took the needed skin from her arms and legs, they took me, and grafted it upon the tanner's brat and the child was saved. The poor Princess suffered, but she beamed with joy when she heard that the child would live, and she was carried to her house by a cheering, adoring multitude of poor people, where she now lies suffering much pain but very happy."

"I must go at once," cried Percy, and he hurried away.

He reached the house of the Princess within an hour, and was much pleased and relieved to find her sitting in the garden in the sunshine listening to the songs of the birds. It was the first time she had been out of doors since the doctors had taken the skin from her body, and she was suffering no longer; but in her eyes shone a deep joy as Percy approached.

"Ah," he said reproachfully, "why did you allow them to do it?"

"It saved the child," she replied, simply, blushing as she saw his loving glance resting upon her face. "I am of no use to anybody," she added, "and I can well spare some of my ugly skin."

"What are you going to do next, I wonder?" he asked.

"I am going home to the court," she replied. "I have no more money, and my work is done here. In my father's city I can find many more poor."

"Will you marry me and let me go there with you?" asked Percy.

"What! Marry me, the hideous, distorted creature, at whom all laugh and whom all avoid!" she cried. "What are you thinking of?" Nevertheless she blushed again.

Percy laughed, but he persisted, and then she said "yes," but still wondering at his blindness.

So they were married at once, and then he took her to his little house in the forest, where he led her to a tall mirror that stood against the wall. She looked at the marvelously beautiful girl whom she saw reflected there and cried:

"Oh, who is this? Is this your sister? Oh, how beautiful!" When she moved the figure moved also, but as she had never before looked in a mirror since her childhood, she did not know that it was herself she saw there, and gazed at the lovely creature with great admiration. All at once it occurred to her that the figure before her wore the same bridal attire as she, and then an awed look came upon her face.

It took a long time and many mirrors to convince Amine that the magic spell had worked so marvelously, and when she was fully persuaded she insisted upon hastening to her parents and showing them what Percy had done, for she declared that it was all his work.

When they arrived at the court all the courtiers and attendants went wild at sight of her beauty, and the King came to see what was causing all the excitement, but when he found that it was his own daughter transformed into such a peerless creature he nearly had a fit.

When his Queen came she was filled with rapture, and both declared that she was lovely enough to marry the Prince of Pagoda, but Percy told them that all that sort of thing had been attended to already, and that she was Mrs. D'Art, which fact the monarch and his wife were compelled to accept and to admit was perfectly just, as Percy was responsible for it all.

Percy and Amine still live there in the palace, and she is as merry as he all day long, and I suppose when the old King died, as he must some day, the people will very likely insist upon Percy becoming king, for of all things on earth there's nothing so jolly as a jolly king.

I am myself going to visit them next winter and paint a portrait of the lovely Princess that will make all the others look like ten-cent tin types, for as time passes she becomes even more and more beautiful and by winter she will be a peach.

—WALT McDUGALL.